

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SUVA 00794 242252Z

ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-05 PC-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00
NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 SCS-05
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FM AMEMBASSY SUVA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6248

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON IMMEDIATE

INFO CINCPAC HI

UNCLAS SUVA 0794

DEPT FOR EA/ANP, AID/PHA/FDRC, PEACE CORPS

WELLINGTON FOR AMBASSADOR SELDEN

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SWEL, TPHY, TN

SUBJECT: TONGA EARTHQUAKE

REF: SUVA 0790

1. I INSPECTED EARTHQUAKE DAMAGE IN TONGAN CAPITAL OF
NUKU'ALOFA AND ITS ENVIRONS YESTERDAY AND CONFERRED WITH GOT
OFFICIALS AND OTHER SOURCES REGARDING CALAMITY.

2. IN HUMAN TERMS, EARTHQUAKE, THOUGH MOST SEVERE EVER IN
TONGA, IS NOT DISASTER. THERE WERE NO FATALITIES, FEW HOUSES
DESTROYED, FOOD SUPPLIES ARE PLENTIFUL, AND ESSENTIAL SERVICES
WERE QUICKLY RESTORED AFTER INITIAL INTERRUPTION. HAD THE QUAKE
TAKEN PLACE IN A HIGHLY DEVELOPED AREA OR EVEN IN SUVA THERE
WOULD HAVE BEEN HEAVY DESTRUCTION IN URBAN SECTIONS AND WIDE-
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PAGE 02 SUVA 00794 242252Z

SPREAD CASUALTIES. BUT MOST PEOPLE WERE HOME IN BED WHEN THE
HEAVY SHOCKS HIT NUKU'ALOFA, TOPPLING CHURCH STEEPLES,
UNDERMINING STRUCTURES OF TWO WHARVES, DESTROYING COMMERCIAL AND
GOVERNMENT SUPPLIES, AND CRACKING FOUNDATIONS WITH RESULTS
YET TO BE ASSESSED.

3. IF NOT A HUMAN CATASTROPHE, EARTHQUAKE MAY BE ECONOMIC

DISASTER FOR GOT IF VERY ROUGH ESTIMATE OF OVER \$1 MILLION IN DAMAGES I OBTAINED PROVES NEARLY CORRECT. TO REBUILD ONE OF THE TWO MAIN WHARVES, WHICH SUBSIDED AND DUMPED AN ESTIMATED \$225,000 OF NEW ZEALAND AID EQUIPMENT INTO THE SEA, MIGHT COST \$300,000 ALONE. UNDERPINNINGS OF ANOTHER, BIGGER WHARF, MUST BE INSPECTED BY EXPERTS BEFORE ASSESSING DAMAGE, WHICH COULD BE EXTENSIVE.

4. NUKU'ALOFA'S ONLY TOURIST HOTEL SUFFERED MANY CRACKS AROUND THE BASE AND SUPPORTING MEMBERS, AND ENGINEERS MAY FIND PART OF IT UNSAFE FOR OCCUPANCY, AS THEY HAVE FOUND ONE-HALF OF THE PRIME MINISTERS OFFICES WHICH INCLUDE GOVT SECRETARIAT AND FORN DEPT.

5. CABINET MET YESTERDAY IN EMERGENCY SESSION TO CONSIDER PRELIMINARY DAMAGE REPORTS. DISASTER COORDINATOR, MIN OF WORKS AND EDUCATION KAVALIKU, TOLD ME GOVT WOULD BE SEEKING OUTSIDE HELP TO REPAIR DAMAGE AFTER REQUIRED FUNDING DETERMINED ON BASIS OF ENGINEERING STUDIES. WHILE MOST OF THIS WILL BE SOUGHT FROM AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND, OUR ASSISTANCE HE MADE CLEAR WOULD BE WELCOME.

6. PEACE CORPS OFFICES ARE MOVING FROM BADLY DAMAGED AND UNSAFE HEADQUARTERS. NO VOLUNTEERS INJURED. DAMAGE SLIGHT ON OUTER ISLAND EXCEPT FOR EUA WHERE HOSPITAL CLOSED, HOUSES DOWN, AND SOME VILLAGERS INJURED.
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PAGE 03 SUVA 00794 242252Z

7. THERE ARE TWO AREAS WHERE WE CAN BE OF ASSISTANCE. I RECOMMEND THAT AMBASSADORS \$25,000 CONTINGENCY FUND BE COMMITTED THROUGH GOT MIN OF EDUCATION FOR REPAIRS PRIMARY SCHOOLS, FIFTEEN OF WHICH WERE DAMAGED. ESTIMATES WERE IN REGION OF \$20,000. RECOMMEND ALSO THAT \$50,000 IN DESTROYED MEDICAL SUPPLIES WHICH FELL FROM SHELVES OF MAIN HOSPITAL BE REPLACED WHEN WE ABLE ASCERTAIN REQUIREMENTS.
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
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